



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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60,000 CANVASBACK DUCKS WINTERING NEAR SABINE REFUGE FOR FIRST TIME IN YEARS

Residents of the Louisiana marsh lands in the vicinity of the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, in southwest Louisiana, are witnessing a sight that has not been seen there in many years. According to officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service, of the United States Department of the Interior, at least 60,000 canvasback ducks swooped down from the skies recently and landed on Mud Lake, about 2 miles from the southern boundary of the Sabine Refuge.

Last year, only 15 canvasback ducks were seen there by Fish and Wildlife Service observers. Canvasbacks regularly winter in Chesapeake Bay, Back Bay, and Currituck Sound on the Atlantic Coast and along various sections of the Gulf Coast from Florida to the Mexican border.

Trappers and old-time hunters of the Sabine Refuge area declared that they had never seen so many canvasbacks in that area at one time. Many of the trappers who hunt migratory waterfowl during their recreation periods did not recognize the species. Johnny Mouton, who has trapped in the coastal marshes along this section of the Gulf of Mexico for more than 15 years, declared he had never seen more than two dozen of these birds on the area in any 1 year.

The mystery of the appearance of the 60,000 wintering "cans" is only partly explained by officials of the Service. In 1939, Mud Lake was dry, and sago pondweed, a favorite food of the canvasback, was scarce. Last fall, however, continuous rains filled the lake, and a high water level has been maintained throughout the season. As a result, the sago pondweed flourished and spread.

Canvasbacks are diving ducks, diving to the lake and pond bottoms for their food. Mud Lake this year, with its bed filled with sago pondweed, is an ideal place for these birds, and the large flock made its appearance as soon as the first of the southern migrations from the prairie provinces of Canada and the northcentral United States began arriving in the Gulf Coast region.

How the canvasbacks learned that Mud Lake, normally not used by these birds, was a good feeding ground, is a mystery that apparently cannot be explained by ornithologists. But southwestern Louisianans are not concerned about the whys and wherefore: They are happy because 60,000 "cans" are on Mud Lake this year.

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